

26 November 2007

Mr Bruce Buckley
Strategic Director – Children and Younger Adults
Derbyshire County Council
Children and Younger Adults Department
County Hall
Matlock
Derbyshire
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Dear Mr Buckley

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority, some of which was conducted at the same time as the analysis element of the joint area review. The 2006 annual performance assessment informed the scoping of the joint area review and the initial findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment were taken into account by the joint area review team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the joint area review were then considered alongside a review of recent data in arriving at the final annual performance assessment judgements for 2007. As a result, many of the areas for development highlighted in this letter align with the recommendations in the joint area review report and should be similarly aligned in any future action plan produced by the council and its partners. The judgements in the letter also draw on your assessment of progress or review of the Children and Young People's Plan where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the process.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

The overall effectiveness of the council remains good. This is the case for all areas of the council's work. In some areas, for example the council's work on improving children's educational enjoyment and achievement, the council is very effective. Where services remain good overall but require further improvement the council has plans, some recent, that identify what is to be done.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Action plans to promote a healthy lifestyle are informed by a good needs analysis and reflect effective multi-agency involvement. Examples include good promotion of sport, exercise and healthy eating programmes in schools and a pathfinder project to develop skills for parents of 2- to 13-year-olds. The positive impact of drug education programmes in schools has been evidenced by survey results and all youth justice targets in relation to drugs prevention and treatment were rated good by the National Treatment Agency in 2007. Young people with substance misuse problems have good access to assessment and treatment. The impact of named nurses for looked after children and young people has been realised and the percentage of health assessments has improved considerably this year and is well above comparators; an area identified as needing improvement at the time of the 2006 annual performance assessment. However, in contrast, a key area for improvement identified in the 2006 assessment where progress has not been good is the work to reduce teenage pregnancies. Available data confirms that, although overall the local authority is in line with national trends, there remain areas where the underlying trend in teenage pregnancies has continued to rise. The impact of dedicated posts in the north of the county to tackle this issue has yet to be evaluated.

There is now a 24-hour Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) available for emergency contact, although the take up of this improved provision or its impact are not yet evident. The council is actively piloting ways of working to improve the integration of assessment and care planning services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through its 'team around the child' model.

There is very good participation in the obesity strategy by schools across the whole area.

Area for development

- Improve the impact of the work to reduce teenage pregnancies.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. The Derbyshire Children's Safeguarding Board is now established with wide representation, a well developed business plan and clear terms of reference for sub-committees.

A clearly written guidance document 'Meeting the needs of Derbyshire children' has been produced in 2007 to promote understanding of risk and thresholds for referral. The new safeguarding procedures are well supported by a comprehensive training programme involving a pool of trainers from partner agencies.

While there has been delay in fully implementing recommendations from serious case reviews, key findings have now resulted in action plans that have been agreed and implemented to address concerns, and learning points have been used to inform the training strategy.

The percentage of initial assessments completed within seven working days of referral has increased and the percentage of referrals leading to initial assessment has risen significantly though remains below the national average. The percentage of core assessments completed within timescale has improved and is very good. The overall number of core assessments has increased but remains well below comparators. A recent regulatory inspection raised concerns about how children and young people were restrained and the quality and availability of appropriate restraint training for staff. On-time child protection reviews remain at 100% for the fourth year and performance on re-registrations has improved and is better than comparable authorities. A survey of parents' views following child protection conferences has led to changes in practice to promote service users' ability to participate. All child protection cases are allocated to qualified social workers.

Comprehensive data on numbers of contacts, referrals, initial and core assessments are available to managers. However, performance information presented to the safeguarding board on staying safe activity has, at times, lacked sufficient analysis to help inform strategy. The number of referrals and repeat referrals has risen. The reasons for this have not been analysed by the council. However, the recording of 'contacts' confuses the way referrals are triggered. Re-training for frontline staff on thresholds for referral to the directorate is underway but has not yet been completed.

The fostering service has been reconfigured in response to recommendations in previous inspections. Stability of looked after children and young people has improved and is good and children and young people are more likely to be placed near home than those in similar authorities. The council is actively trying to recruit more locally-based foster homes to meet need. Performance indicators on adoption, while acceptable, remain below comparators. Capacity in adoption services has been increased to strengthen recruitment. All looked after children and young people are allocated to qualified social workers and the timeliness of reviews is very good and above similar authorities and the national average. A good multi-agency strategy and action plan are in place to promote awareness of private fostering.

The council have established an anti-bullying scheme in over 300 schools which has now been introduced to children's homes. The impact of this work can be seen in the results of the Tellus2 Survey of Year 8 and year 10 pupils with most reporting that they believe their school deals effectively with bullying.

Area for development

- Analyse and respond to the rising numbers of referrals and repeat referrals and improve the percentage leading to initial assessment.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Outcomes at the end of the Foundation Stage continue to be well above the national average. By the end of Key Stage 1, standards also continue to be at least above and well above the national average for reading and mathematics. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are above average in mathematics and science. In English, standards are in line with the national average although in 2006 there were a higher proportion of children achieving above average results than the year before. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 remain in line with the national average in English and mathematics and have moved above the national average for science. The improvements at the end of Key Stage 3 in mathematics and science are more significant compared to statistical neighbours. Overall, the progress made by pupils from Key Stage 1 to 2 and from Key Stage 2 to 3 is satisfactory. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have improved. However, in 2006 the proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C was lower than the statistical and national comparators. Furthermore, the overall increase in this figure from 2005 to 2006 was not as significant as the national increase or that of statistical neighbours. Early indications for 2007 suggest standards have risen although it is too early to make comparisons against national or statistical neighbours.

Based on inspection outcomes, the proportion of schools that are good or outstanding is above the national average. The local authority is very effective in supporting and challenging schools causing concern. This has resulted in a lower proportion of Derbyshire schools being in categories of concern compared with the national average and that for its statistical neighbours. The local authority has been very successful in reducing the number of primary and secondary schools not attaining floor targets. For example, no secondary schools failed to achieve at least 25% five or more GCSE A* to C grades. Recently the authority has put into place a range of intervention strategies to reduce the gap between boys and girls' achievement at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2; it is too early to evaluate the impact in detail. Achievement for looked after children and young people is well below that of all other pupils. However, recent test data shows that the achievement gap between looked after children and young people and the local authority average for all pupils is beginning to close. For example, there has been improvement in the

proportion of looked after children and young people achieving at least one GCSE grade A* to G or equivalent. Inspection found that in most schools, the achievement of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was good. Although the percentage of statements of special educational need issued within 18 weeks including and excluding exceptions had fallen and was well below average, action taken has led to significant improvement.

Although the 2006 attendance rates fell in both primary and secondary schools and were in line with the national average, more recent data shows improvement. The absence rates for looked after children and young people have fallen but are still above the national average. Permanent exclusions of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities remain high. The local authority has recently instigated a more thorough check and intervenes when there have been two fixed-term exclusions, but the long-term impact of this work has yet to be seen. Inspection outcomes, and the findings of the Tellus2 survey, show that most pupils enjoy school, representing a similar picture to that found nationally.

Areas for development

- Continue to improve pupils' achievement at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Take action to eliminate permanent exclusion of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. A charter has been developed which provides a framework for organisations to assess and improve young people's participation in services. In general, the council seeks the views of children and young people and the Children and Young People's Plan is influenced by what they say.

The range of programmes to support emotional and social development of children and young people is good; examples include developing leadership skills via the authority's University of First Age programme, with positive outcomes for young people reported. The council has recently consulted with over 1,800 secondary school pupils on the five *Every child matters* outcomes and findings have informed council strategy in a number of areas.

Opportunities for looked after children and young people to express their views on services are being developed via a forum and other initiatives to promote their participation. Access to independent advocates for looked after children and young people has improved, with increased capacity from four to 12 sessional workers supervised by the Children's Rights Officer. Numbers of looked after children and

young people participating in their reviews has increased to the 'very good' band. There are specific examples of how young people in children's homes have contributed to change in arrangements for statutory reviews.

Opportunities to contribute to the community include the Youth Forum's involvement in allocation of Youth Opportunities Funding; 45% of all approved projects are targeted at hard-to-reach groups or deprived wards. There is a good range of programmes in place for reducing anti-social behaviour and preventing substance misuse.

Young people in care and care leavers are contributing to Total Respect training for practitioners.

Links between the Youth Offending Service and the Children and Young Adults Directorate are not sufficiently robust to address the underlying issues for looked after children and young people who offend. Final warnings and convictions of looked after children and young people have risen and are above the national and comparator averages. Planned targets have not been achieved. The percentage of young people aged 13 to 19 involved with youth services has improved and is well above the national average.

Area for development

- Improve the links between the Youth Offending Service and the Children and Young Adults Directorate in order to reach targets for final warnings and convictions of children and young people in care.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. The average point score for 16- to 18-year-olds continues to rise and is in line with the national average. Level 2 achievements by the age of 19 are improving. The NVQ success rate for all work-based learning has also improved.

The local authority is developing a much more strategic overview of 14 to 19 and has created nine learning communities to address local needs. To lead the work in these learning communities the local authority has appointed 14 to 19 managers whilst also improving the working partnerships with the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions. A published 14 to 19 action plan involving all partners has been produced to outline key actions. Schools within each local community are developing joint curriculum plans and harmonised timetables although these are not yet all in place. Generally provision for 14 to 19 does vary across the local authority and provision specifically in the High Peak area is unsatisfactory.

There has been an increase in the number of young people taking up apprenticeships. The local authority is improving the provision for vocational courses for example, through the establishment of three new vocational academies in the High Peak, Derbyshire Dales and one in the south of the county. Strategic planning for 14 to 19 also includes the building schools for the future initiatives.

A number of vulnerable/disengaged learners have been engaged in learning via Entry to Employment programmes. A high percentage of young people with disabilities receive transition plans to support their move to adult services.

The percentage of young people in education, employment and training is in line with the national average for 16- to 18-year-olds but lower for 19-year-olds. There is a higher than national average proportion of teenage mothers in education, employment and training. The percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training is very good and well above national comparators. Although the overall percentage of young people not in education, employment and training has fallen and targets have been met, there remains significant variation. Data collated by Connexions on Year 11 progression for each secondary school shows levels of not in education, employment and training ranging from 0.87% to as high as 14.94%.

Area for development

- Reduce the variation in not in education, employment and training figures across the local authority.

Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people is outstanding. The local authority has strong and effective senior leadership in place with a very strong track record in securing improvements. A comprehensive Children and Young People's Plan was developed with key partners including children and young people. It was based on a wide ranging needs analysis. The recent refresh and evaluation has appropriately identified gaps in provision and clearly sets out actions to address these. The trend in improvement is good in most areas and timely action is taken when areas of weakness are identified in most instances. Evidence of this can be seen in the improved proportion of key performance indicators in the good or very good bands. For example, there has been an improvement in the proportion of health checks for looked after children and young people, an area identified at the time of the last annual performance assessment. Other evidence includes the percentage of core assessments completed within timescale, the improved looked after children achievement, and the more strategically planned approach to the economic well being of 14- to 19-year-olds. In all of this work the local authority's ambitions and the priorities identified to safeguard and improve the well being of children and young people are good.

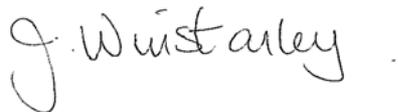
Levels of recruitment, retention and staff development currently put the council in a good position to continue to provide quality services. The local authority has a number of areas where development is at a very early stage. A strong commitment to partnership working is evident and is being further strengthened at district level. Although in these areas, there is evidence of the council improving provision, initiatives have not been in place long enough to measure the full impact as projected by the council.

Area for development

- Ensure that effective action is taken to redress any gaps in provision as identified by the recent refresh and evaluation.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection